

"Is It American to Let People Starve?"

Anarchism and the Haymarket Riot

Michael Schwab

Workers began to organize to gain more control in the new industrial workplace. The first major interstate strike was the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, which affected some two-thirds of the nation's railways. In its wake, membership grew in the Knights of Labor, a union that included both skilled and unskilled workers. But in 1886, an act of violence turned public opinion strongly against the labor movement.

The Haymarket Riot occurred in Chicago at a protest against a police attack on strikers. A bomb was thrown into the crowd, killing several people. Anarchist leaders were sentenced to death for the crime, despite a lack of convincing evidence. Michael Schwab, one of the anarchists, addressed the court after his conviction.

It is not much I have to say. And I would say nothing at all if keeping silent did not look like a cowardly approval of what has been done here. To term the proceedings during the trial justice would be a sneer. Justice has not been done—more than this, could not be done. If one class is arrayed against the other, it is idle and hypocritical to think about justice. Anarchy was on trial, as the state's attorney put it in his closing speech—a doctrine, an opinion, hostile to brute force, hostile to our present murderous system of production and distribution. I am condemned to die for writing newspaper articles and making speeches. . . .

It is not violence in word or action the attorneys of the State and their urgers-on are waging war against; it is our doctrine—anarchy.

We contend for communism and anarchy—why? If we had kept silent, stones would have cried out. Murder was committed day by day. Children were slain; women worked to death; men killed inch by inch, and these crimes are never punished by law. The great principle underlying the present system is unpaid labor. Those who amass fortunes, build palaces, and live in luxury are doing these things by virtue of unpaid labor. Being directly or indirectly the possessors of land

and machinery, they dictate terms to the workingman. He is compelled to sell his labor cheap or to starve. The price paid him is always far below the real value. He acts under compulsion, and they call it a free contract. This infernal state of affairs keeps him poor and ignorant, an easy prey for exploitation. . . .

What these common laborers are today, the skilled laborers will be tomorrow. Improved machinery that ought to be a blessing for the workingman under the existing conditions becomes for him a curse. Machinery multiplies the army of unskilled laborers, makes the laborer more dependent upon the men who own the land and machines. And that is the reason that socialism and communism got a foothold in this country. The outcry that socialism, communism, and anarchism are the creed of foreigners is a big mistake. There are more socialists of American birth in this country than foreigners, and that is much, if we consider that more than half of all industrial workingmen are native Americans. There are socialistic papers in a great many states edited by Americans for Americans. The capitalistic newspapers conceal that fact very carefully.

Socialism, as we understand it, means that land and machinery shall be held in common by the people. The pro-

duction of goods shall be carried on by productive groups which shall supply the demands of the people. Under such a system, every human being would have an opportunity to do useful work, and no doubt would work. Some hours' work every day would suffice to produce all, according to statistics, that is necessary for a comfortable living. Time would be left to cultivate the mind and to further science and art.

That is what the socialists propose. Some say it is un-American! Well, then, is it American to let people starve and die in ignorance? Is exploitation and robbery of the poor, American? What have the great political parties done for the poor? Promised much, done nothing—except corrupting them by buying their votes on election day. A poverty-stricken man has no interest in the welfare of the community. It is only natural that in a society where women are driven to sell their honor, men should sell their votes.

But we were not only "socialists and communists," we were "anarchists." What is anarchy?

Is it not strange that when anarchy was tried, nobody ever told what anarchy was? Even when I was on the witness stand and asked the state's attorney for a definition of anarchy, he declined to give it. But in their speeches, he and his associates spoke very frequently about anarchy, and it appeared that they understood it to be something horrible—arson, rapine,

murder. . . . "Anarchy" is Greek and means, verbatim: without rulership; not being ruled. According to our vocabulary, anarchy is a state of society in which the only government is reason; a state of society in which all human beings do right for the simple reason that it is right and hate wrong because it is wrong. In such a society, no laws, no compulsion will be necessary. . . .

"The Wild-Eyed Agitator"

An Anarchist Assassinate President McKinley

Ohio State Journal

Anarchist Leon Czolgosz assassinated President William McKinley in September 1901. In the wake of a third presidential assassination, the Ohio State Journal questioned whether America's tradition of liberty could survive unlimited immigration and dangerous new ideas.

A great calamity has befallen the American people. The black pall of a great sorrow covers the land. President McKinley is dead. . . .

The great loss is all the more terrible because it has brought an unspeakable disgrace upon the American people. Three times within a generation the noblest and the best of American presidents have fallen by the hand of an assassin.

No other country in the world has such a black blot upon it in this respect as free America. Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley—three martyrs to liberty and nationality in less than forty years. Not even despotic, absolute Russia can show such a record. There is crushing humiliation in the fact.

Has it come that liberty cannot exist without license running riot? Must order-loving America, with all its freedom, its intelligence, and its abounding prosperity, admit reluctantly that its measure of liberty, in speech and press, has been too great?

Certainly the time has come when anarchy must be stamped out in America and immigration must be restricted more sharply. We have been too careless of the wild-eyed agitator spouting on the street corner; too tolerant also of the demagogue inciting class against class for party and personal advantage. Serene in our confidence in American self-control, the mad rantings of anarchy and demagoguery have been passed by as harmless vaporings.

This has been a mistake. We must realize that American cities have become cosmopolitan. In their congested centers are thousands who have no true appreciation of the meaning of liberty. Greater efforts at enlightenment in these districts must be made, and with them must be enforced a greater respect for law and higher regard for public office as it typifies the whole people.

It is entirely wrong to use the word anarchy as synonymous with violence. Violence is one thing and anarchy another. In the present state of society, violence is used on all sides, and, therefore, we advocated the use of violence against violence,

but against violence only, as a necessary means of defense. . . . I have not the slightest idea who threw the bomb on the Haymarket and had no knowledge of any conspiracy to use violence on that or any other night.

"To Make a Millionaire a Billionaire"

Life in a Company Town

Pullman Strikers

In 1894, workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company, which manufactured railroad cars, protested wage cuts and company control of housing and stores. Their town—Pullman, Illinois—was entirely owned by their employer, George Pullman. The company used an injunction to prevent the union from obstructing the railways and the mails. President Grover Cleveland finally sent troops to end the strike. This statement by the Pullman strikers was delivered at a convention of the American Railway Union.

Mr. President and Brothers of the American Railway Union: We struck at Pullman because we were without hope. We joined the American Railway Union because it gave us a glimmer of hope. Twenty thousand souls, men, women, and little ones, have their eyes turned toward this convention today, straining eagerly through dark despondency for a glimmer of heaven-sent message you alone can give us on this earth.

. . . Five reductions in wages, in work, and in conditions of employment swept through the shops at Pullman between May and December, 1893. The last was the most severe, amounting to nearly thirty percent, and our rents had not fallen. We owed Pullman \$70,000 when we struck May 11. We owe him twice as much today. He does not evict us for two reasons: one, the force of popular sentiment and public opinion; the other because he hopes to starve us out, to break through in the back of the American Railway Union, and to deduct

from our miserable wages when we are forced to return to him the last dollar we owe him for the occupancy of his houses.

Rents all over the city in every quarter of its vast extent have fallen, in some cases to one-half. Residences, compared with which ours are hovels, can be had a few miles away at the price we have been contributing to make a millionaire a billionaire. What we pay \$15 for in Pullman is leased for \$8 in Roseland; and remember that just as no man or woman of our 4,000 toilers has ever felt the friendly pressure of George M. Pullman's hand, so no man or woman of us all has ever owned or can ever hope to own one inch of George M. Pullman's land. Why, even the very streets are his. . . .

Water which Pullman buys from the city at 8 cents a thousand gallons he retails to us at 500 percent advance and claims he is losing \$400 a month on it. Gas which sells at 75 cents per thousand feet in Hyde Park, just north of us, he sells for \$2.25. When we went to tell him our grievances, he said we were all his "children."